



Review

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The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region. By Andrew R. L. Cayton and Peter S. Onuf. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990.

This compact book (169 pages) grew out of a 1987 symposium of scholars brought together at Indiana University to commemorate the bicentennial of the Northwest Ordinance. Cayton and Onuf prepared a manuscript on the "state of scholarship" (p. ix) of the Old Northwest which served as a basis for discussion by 16 experts on various phases of midwestern history. Cayton and Onuf then revised their manuscript into this book.

The authors say this about their purpose in writing the book: "Our intention in *The Midwest and the Nation: Rethinking the History of an American Region* is to analyze recent work by historians of the Old Northwest in the nineteenth century and to suggest interpretative frameworks for future study of this important American region . . . In brief, what we have attempted to write is an extended and often speculative essay . . . our subject is less the actual *history* of the region than *historians'* interpretation of it . . . We are, in short, investigating the ways in which historians have constructed the history of the Midwest" (p. xi).

The book contains six chapters: "The Significance of the Northwest Ordinance"; "The Peopling of the Old Northwest"; "The Origins of Community in the Old Northwest"; "The Origins of Politics in the Old Northwest"; "The Politics of Cultural Definition"; and "The Politics of Accommodation and the Significance of the Frontier." There are seven pages of index and 35 pages of footnotes.

The book is an overview and literature summary of recent work on the social and political history of the Midwest during the nineteenth century. The first half of the century receives more attention than the last half, and Ohio receives more coverage than the other states. Although there are many references to the rise of commercial capitalism and to midwesterners' ambivalence toward this growing market economy, this is not a book about the economic history of the region. The emphasis is not on how and why the Midwest developed economically but rather on the various ways which that development affected the social and political fabric of the newly formed midwestern states. The Transportation Revolution (to use George Rogers Taylor's term) not only tied the Midwest's economy to the rest of the nation, it interacted with emerging industrialization and urbanization to form class interests. In this regard, an important role was also played by immigration and religion. The resulting political struggles during the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century were about the degree to which traditional relationships and values would be transformed during the rapid pace of economic development.

The authors probably try to do too much in their 126 pages of text, and there is a good deal of skipping from topic to topic within each chapter, yet the writing is good. I thought chapters four and five were the most focused. There is an interesting discussion of the literature on the emer-

gence of political parties: the Whigs, Democrats, and Republicans. What do I like best about this book? The book is well worth the price in order to have access to the 35 pages of footnote references. The insightful summaries of the literature are a very valuable added dividend. Most scholars of the Old Northwest would want their own copy of this book; every library should have a copy.

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A Century of Research: Centennial History of the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, 1888–1988. By Stephen F. Strousberg. Fayetteville, Arkansas: Arkansas Experiment Station, 1989.

Until World War I, most southern Agricultural Experiment Stations had a difficult time convincing farmers that their advice could improve farmers' chances of bettering themselves. In fact, as Stephen Strousberg tells us in his interesting and informative history of the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Robert L. Bennett (the second director of the station) once "confided to Adam True, director of the office of Experiment Stations, that most farmers in the state were not aware that the Experiment Station existed" (p. 19).

Reaching farmers was not the only obstacle the Arkansas Station had to overcome in its attempt to educate farmers. Other issues station scientists faced were: inadequate facilities and funding, lack of university and state support, political interference, and criticism from populist farmers as well as newspapers, particularly the *Arkansas Gazette*, that bulletins were incomprehensible to ordinary farmers, many of whom were illiterate. Despite the controversies hovering around them, station scientists completed dozens of experiments typical of southern stations. These experiments primarily investigated the merits of diversified farming and field crop and horticulture tests. However, these experiments were mostly ignored, according to Strousberg, because Arkansas farmers, especially tenants, could not readily change their farming practices without adequate capital which many cash-poor small farmers and tenants (and also some landlords) did not possess.

During World War I the work of the Arkansas Station attracted more widespread attention from farmers across the state. Normally a bulletin would be requested by a few thousand farmers. Yet in the war years station bulletins on wheat and potatoes were sent to 40,000 Arkansas farmers. After the war the work of the station primarily focused on cotton and somewhat on rice.

Despite the spurt of interest in other crops, in the 1920s Arkansas farmers remained skeptical of scientific farming and devoted considerable acreage to cotton cultivation. In addition landlords were reluctant to make